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Genre Interference in the Process of Foreign Language Speaking Training

Elena N. Vavilova^{a*}, Marina A. Korneeva^b, Nguyen Ngoc Quy^a

^a*Tomsk Polytechnic University, 30, Lenin ave., Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

^b*Tomsk State University, 36, Lenin ave., Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

Abstract

This article is devoted to a study of speech genre competence formation in technical students studying foreign language (English or Russian as a foreign). Correlations of terms of speech genre theory and types of speech genre classification are the subject of this work; the need to form speech genre competence as a component of communicative competence during the educational process is substantiated. The authors suppose that during the process of learning a foreign language, processes not only of phonetic, grammar and lexical, but also of genre interference are observed. On the basis of a «genre» experiment, material types of deviations from genre forms were classified, a hypothesis for the reasons for deviation was developed, comparison study of speech product in foreign (non-native) and native language, was carried out. Conclusion on significant interfering influence of native language on formation of speech genre competence of secondary linguistic identity was drawn.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally in foreign language education in higher educational institution, much attention is paid to vocabulary, grammar, speech perception (reading and listening) and, certainly, speaking. There are teaching methods with different degrees of communicative orientation. The following situation often takes place, however: at the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-3822-56-38-17.

E-mail address: vavilen@tpu.ru

initial stage the teacher's attention is focused on correcting lexical and grammatical mistakes, and at advanced stages the focus of attention is shifted to monologues (reports, presentations) or informative dialogue (discussion, dispute). Thus, a certain gap appears in the genre repertoire of a person studying a foreign language. And it is worth mentioning that when testing language level, the specific speech genres tested are obligatory. For example: «invitation/ advice / request for information/ and etc.» at the initial stage; «objection, reproach, consolation, and etc.» at the next stages. In this case, the task is formed as «express intension». A review of study guides shows that study guides include such tasks, but often they aren't systematized. In more systematic way the basic repertoire of speech genres is shown in the first part of phrasebooks (and then, in situations classified by theme: hotel, city, transport, shop and etc.), or in special additional study guides devoted to expressing feelings and opinions, etiquette, and etc.

However, it can be said without prejudice that during speech formation in ontogenesis, in one's native language, not even words come first in our speech communication, but more simple speech acts: consent («yes») / refusal («no»), drawing attention («mother»), requesting («give»). Consequently, from the first moment of our speech act we speak, talking not with the help of words and sentences, but with the help of speech genres. And accordingly, speech genres should be front and in the development of communicative competence.

In connection with abovementioned, the question of the correlation of the terms «speech act» and «speech genre» arises, as well as the problem of defining the term «speech genre».

In recent years, a tendency towards generalizing and conceptualizing experience in studying speech genres has become noticeable in research focused on the problems of genre studies, along with a drive to unify the definitions. It is still not possible to confirm that a system of general terms or classification of speech genres has been developed, but the majority of researchers tend to define speech genre as verbal and sign-oriented handling of a typical communicative situation, characterized by thematic, composition, and stylistic stability (Akulova, 2011; Sedov, 2009; Bakhtin, 1979, etc.).

The situation with classification is slightly more complicated. So far there is classification by spontaneity / preparedness characteristic; by volume; by intention of speaking person (and in this classification affinity of speech genres theory and speech acts theory takes place in foreign linguistics). The most useful taxonomies according to T.V. Shmelev include informative, imperative, etiquette, and evaluative genres, and according to N.D. Arutyunova: informative dialogue; prescriptive dialogue; opinions exchange with the aim of making a decision or investigating the truth; dialogue, with the aim of establishing or regulating interpersonal relations; leisure speech genres. There are other classifications by illocutionary goal, however, the opposition of informative and phatic genres is the most essential (Dementyev, 2010, etc.).

As a part of this paper we are interested in the formation and functioning of primary (simple) elementary (including subgenres), mainly phatic speech genres.

When studying a foreign language the question of intercommunication of genre and cultural definitions becomes important. There is no doubt that genre is a socially and culturally based phenomenon (Sedov, 2009; Akulova, 2011). It is known that there are specific genres for ethnos, but there are much more universal genres with common components. At the same time, as Akulova E.V. supposes (2011), the coincidence of genre names doesn't always mean that the compared genres are identical: they may differ by structure and could be used in different functions. An illustration of this fact could be contrastive studies of speech genres (e.g., the announcement genre in different languages), proving the misconception of the equivalency of genres with the same name.

These conclusions serve as a basis to pay due attention to formation of speech genre competence during the process of foreign language education. The formation of speech genre competence under conditions of artificial bilingualism is considered by N. Y. Smirnova in her paper (Smirnova, 2010). She comes to the conclusion that adults already have a well-formed system of genre thinking in their native language, and they rely on this system when learning a second language. Moreover, this process goes more successfully at the initial stage, and more slowly, in spite of better knowledge of the foreign language (vocabulary and grammar), at the next one. In our opinion, this can be explained by simplicity of more frequent speech genres and functions, performed by them. On the other hand, a mother tongue in the background could have a positive influence as well as negative, leading to interference.

Interference within the framework of this paper is understood as the process and result of the intercommunication of language systems under the conditions of bilingualism (artificial in this case), arising during individual acquisition

of a non-mother tongue and expressed in deviations from the standard system of the second language under the influence of the native one, or of a second foreign language under the influence of the first (e.g., Russian language for Chinese or Vietnamese students, having knowledge of English).

Traditionally, interference, arising in the educational process, is analyzed on phonetic, grammar and lexical levels (Rogoznaya, 2001). Teaching practice shows, however, that together with these phenomena the interference of genre forms is observed. Unfortunately, this phenomena was given inadequate attention, and only in some papers could references to linguoculturological mistakes be found, to which mistakes in forming speech genres could be put down (Belyaeva, 2004). In foreign studies, for example by Karim Ek Hiani (2015), problems of handling speech acts are considered important, however, phenomena of interference are considered only in positive way and problems in speech genre competence of students are left to methods and student books.

2. Methods

In order to prove the existence of such phenomena — genre interference — we have conducted a «genre experiment»: at the beginning of the academic year, at a time of (supposed) regression of foreign language skills, students were required to produce different elementary speech genres (hereinafter SG) in certain communicative situation in two variants, depending on addressee's level (in this case addressees — a friend or fellow student and a teacher).

Students were required to recreate 9 frequent elementary speech genres (greeting, acquaintance, introduction, congratulations, invitation, request, offer of assistance, compliment), 1 of rare occurrence (condolences), 8 reactive genres (advice, request, gratitude, praise, reproach, apology, refusal, agreement, objection). Moreover, five tasks with the prompt «express... (feeling, emotion)» were offered.

Task sample:

- Greet a friend /teacher;
- Say goodbye to a friend /teacher;
- Call a friend, greet him with a happy birthday/ greet a teacher with happy birthday;
- Compliment a friend / teacher;
- Express dissatisfaction/ reproach to a friend /teacher;
- Express condolences on the occasion of a great-grandma's death to a friend /teacher. Etc.

Participants

Participants are 15 first-year students studying Russian as a foreign language, predominantly Vietnamese (B1 level), and 13 first-year Russian students of the medical university as a control group; as well as 15 students of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of the historical faculty of TSU, studying English at a A2 – B2 level at the time the questionnaire was completed.

Moreover, material, earlier raised in the process of students was used during analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The questionnaire gave the following results:

The most established in speech are undoubtedly the genres of greeting and leave taking. The problems discovered in the Russian “greetings” in some cases proved to be an attempt to complete a structure that had not been heard clearly. The analysis of the responses given by Russian students of English lead to similar results. In most cases, the respondents used time-based greetings in communication with the teacher (Good Morning, Good Afternoon, Good Evening) and such forms as *Hi* and *Hey* when greeting each other. The status of *Hi* is something we should pay attention to; because in the mind of a Russian native speaker this form of greeting is equivalent to the Russian informal greeting “Privet”, no respondent indicated it as appropriate for communication with a teacher because it is unacceptable in Russian culture. In an English-speaking country, however, one can hear a student greet a teacher using this word, especially if the conversation partners already know each other, and such a form is not a rude or disrespectful greeting. Though not a pure example of a genre transfer, this case, however, does illustrate status interference within one genre.

The genres of commendation, reproach, refusal, contradiction and compliment proved to be less established and utilized. In many cases, the participants left these items of the speech and genre questionnaire blank. The least established genres among Russian students of English also proved to be reproach, commendation, compliment and contradiction. Furthermore, absence of genre knowledge was expressed in the category in which the respondent (student) addresses the teacher. In fact, one third of the respondents did not know how to express commendation to a teacher, and half did not know how to express discontent.

We can assume that there are two reasons for such a state of affairs: 1) a linguistic and methodical reason due to the fact that these genres are not purposely taught at the B1 level, 2) social/ linguistic and cultural reasons from the fact that these speech genres are meant to assess another person's actions, and hence there is some inequality of social roles (top-down) which may be a conflict-provoking factor in otherwise equal communication, but is acceptable if roles are unequal and the status of the addressee (teacher) is higher. Thus, the above speech genres remain in low demand and underdeveloped.

In the cases when the participants did try to express themselves in the underdeveloped genre, the results revealed intralingual interference of genres, such as commendation and compliment in Russian as a foreign language: "Ty takoj krasivyj" (You are so beautiful), "Tvoja doch' takaja krasivaja" (Your daughter is so beautiful), "Ty kupil novyj telefon, on ochen' krasivyj" (You bought a new phone, it's very nice), "horoshie" (good), "horosho" (well), "horosho delat!" (do well, it is quite possible that the latter example shows the impact of English). On the other hand, in responses in English, one can observe interference of the genres of commendation and agreement with a teacher's opinion. Expressing commendation to the teacher, some respondents said "You're right" which is rather an indication of agreement with the teacher's opinion. We should point out that the control group of Russian participants commonly used "well done" to express commendation and more rarely such words as "cool, man", etc.

Even less represented and relevant in the questionnaires of all respondents was the genre of reproach or discontent. For instance, answers of B1 Vietnamese students show explicit evaluation through the words "not good, bad, I don't like" and indirect judgement (which is more characteristic of Russian) with the interrogative word *why*.

"This is bad, you shouldn't do it", "I don't like M. Why was she in my room?" Besides, this genre remains poorly established among second year students as well. In the questionnaires completed by the Russian students the speech genre of reproach/ discontent was not expressed in almost 50% of the cases, and the presented answers were not standard and vary considerably from each other. Paradoxically as it may seem, explicitly negative evaluation was demonstrated more among the Vietnamese students, which is not characteristic of their linguistic culture. On the other hand, this may explain their inability to express themselves in the reproach genre.

As for the students of English, we can point out examples of genre interference in refusals of help. Most respondents performed this task successfully; however 10 percent of respondents did show examples of genre interference. Such forms as "I needn't help," "Thanks, but I don't need this" are obviously strong examples of phrases in a foreign language produced through the semantic filter of a native language.

The genre of congratulations (on a birthday) seemed not to be difficult to any student of English, and the same was true for the students of Russian. Here, however, we should highlight one feature characteristic of the Vietnamese students: direct reference to the event itself, "Today is your birthday" or "Do you know what day it is today?" Such a formulation of a wish is especially interesting because it develops in a social and cultural context; however, this is a theme for separate research.

The genre of condolences is illustrative. A request to produce an utterance in the genre of condolences may be considered provocative because even native speakers are not good at this scarcely used genre: almost half of the Russian control group did not give any answer; the most common form was "My condolences". More non-standard forms were "I'm so sorry"; "Friend, I'm with you"; "Oh, it's so terrible. If there is anything I can help, don't hesitate to ask". Among Russian students of English, this genre also presented some problems. Only two respondents could provide the standard form of expressing condolences, "I'm sorry for your loss". Among other forms, the most popular expressions included *My condolences* and *I'm so sorry*. A strong example of both genre and grammatical transfer is a form of expressing condolences offered by 10% of the respondents – "I'm so sorry to you", which is obviously a direct equivalent of the Russian way of expressing condolences, because preposition *to* is not normally used in this structure. It is interesting that the combination of this very preposition with the noun creates the impression of the dative case (this case is present in Russian) in the English language, though this case is not present in English grammar.

Among the Vietnamese students, only second-year students could reply; some forms of their replies are more relevant, though peripheral, like “Hold on, I’m with you”, and less relevant, in which we can see a copy of their native genre, such as “Brother, I know you are very bored/ sad. I’m always with you”, “Hold yourself by the hand. I’m always with you”.

Thus, speaking about speech genre competence and the impact of genre interference on it, it is necessary to note that depending on the quality of speech expertise, the degree of impact varies from 30 to 60% as estimated by a native speaker (for Vietnamese students). Moreover, we can point out the following:

- Copying from the genre of the native language was most obvious in the speech genres that are scarcely used in every-day life (for instance, condolences).
- In some cases, in our opinion, we can talk about “marginal interference” when students select a an uncommon, peripheral form in a genre, but one which is, on the other hand, the closest to their native language. If the situation is complicated by the improper use of grammar, an involuntary replacement of a genre is possible. For example, “you can come to us” in the speech genre of invitation will be perceived as the speech genre of consent.
- The same ambition to adhere as close to the standard form as possible and to keep the familiar social and cultural membrane can explain the addition of components that are not part of a genre in the foreign language (e.g., directly referencing an event in the genre of congratulations).
- Moreover, B1 students are obviously lacking in the repertoire of speech genres and have few variations of expressions within one genre. The same drawback is also observed in the representatives of the control group whose members were native speakers of similar age and social status. At the same time, it is possible that the speakers will try to use genres that are characteristic of Russian communication: for example, a wish of a good evening before partying with an almost unknown person given by a German student caused a brief reflection — *Do you say such things?* Thus, transfer can be a way to fill speech genre gaps.
- In addition, we should point out that indirect speech genres are very popular in the speech of students from Southeast Asia, and their intentions may not be completely clear to the teacher. On the other hand, Russian communication also abounds with indirect speech genres (Nesterova, 2013) and the intentions here are hardly recognizable without the relevant conversational context, for instance a speech genre of “request” in the form “Do you have a pen?” almost always is recognized to be an information request.
- The interference of speech genres in letters and documents can be considered the prospect for this research.

4. Conclusion

Thus, even if lexical and grammatical means are used properly, improper proper use of genre forms creates an impression of speech affectation, overly harsh evaluation, etc., which can create short-time communication problems or failures, hamper the communication process, and as a result, strengthen the sense of “the foreign”.

Therefore, in addition to lexical and grammatical studies and the development of verbal and written speech perception skills, one should constantly practice the use of various speech genres in different situations in order to build up speech and genre competence and develop a secondary linguistic identity.

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